

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9137

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 3214

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LA

SUBJECT: SITUATION IN LAOS

1. IN THE COURSE OF LUNCH YESTERDAY WITH DR. SOMPHOU OUMDIVALAY, WHO SERVED AS DEPUTY MINISTER OF ECONOMY DURING MUCH OF MY TOUR IN LAOS, I OBTAINED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION IN LAOS WHICH I BELIEVE WILL BE OF GENERAL INTEREST.

2. DEPARTURE. DR. SOMPHOU WAS A WELL-KNOWN TECHNOCRAT WITH WHAT WERE THEN CONSIDERED TO BE RATHER RADICAL VIEWS. HE WAS VIEWED WITH CONSIDERABLE SUSPICION BY THE PILLARS OF THE LAO ESTABLISHMENT, BUT CARVED OUT A POSITION FOR HIMSELF WHICH, ALTHOUGH TO THE LEFT OF MOST OF THE GOVERNMENT, WAS IN FACT FLEXIBLE, NATIONALISTIC AND UNDOGMATIC. SOMPHOU CONFIRMED TO ME THAT IT HAD BEEN HIS HOPE THAT A FORM OF SOCIALISM COULD
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BE CREATED IN LAOS WHICH WOULD SATISFY THE NEEDS OF THE POPULATION, AND THAT AS A PATRIOT, HE FELT THAT THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DOCTRINE WAS SECONDARY TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS. HIS DECISION TO FLEE TO THAILAND WAS MADE OVER A PERIOD OF MANY MONTHS, DURING WHICH HE BECAME CONVINCED THAT THE PATHET LAO LEADERSHIP

WAS SOLELY INTERESTED IN INFLICTING ITS PARTICULAR FORM OF GOVERNMENT ON LAOS AND IN FURTHERING ITS REVOLUTIONARY DOGMAT DR. SOMPHOU AND HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN ESCAPED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT BY PROCEEDING IN SEPARATE VEHICLES, POSING AS VILLAGERS, TO PAKSAN DOWNSTREAM FROM VIENTIANE AND CROSSING THE RIVER THERE IN SAMPANS OPERATED BY PROFESSIONAL SMUGGLERS WHO HAD BRIBED THE MILITIA IN THAT AREA.

3. PATHET LAO DISENCHANTMENT. I WAS SURPRISED AT THE FERVOR WITH WHICH SOMPHOU DESCRIBED THE DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE PATHET LAO WHICH PREVAILS IN VIRTUALLY ALL SEGMENTS OF LAO SOCIETY. IN HIS VIEW, EVEN THE PATHET LAO SOLDIERS WOULD REVOLT AGAINST THE REGIME IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE PRESENCE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE UNITS IN LAOS. COMMUNIST RHETORIC HAD LED THEM, AS WELL AS THE POPULATION AT LARGE, TO BELIEVE THAT "LIBERATION" WOULD IN SOME WAY IMPROVE THEIR LOT. INSTEAD, THE POPULATION FINDS ITSELF ECONOMICALLY DEPRIVED, POLITICALLY COWED AND UNABLE TO FORESEE ANY IMPROVEMENT IN THE EXISTING STATE OF AFFAIRS. DR. SOMPHOU FURTHER COMMENTED THAT THE IMPOSITION OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME HAD FALLEN PARTICULARLY HARD ON FARMERS WHOSE EARNINGS HAD IN FACT BEEN CONFISCATED BY THE CONVERSION OF THEIR SAVINGS INTO "LIBERATION KIP".

4. INSECURITY. SOMPHOU EMPHASIZED THE SERIOUS STATE OF INSECURITY WHICH PREVAILED IN MUCH OF LAOS. CONFIDENTIAL

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PATHET LAO FUNCTIONARIES WERE FEARFUL OF TRAVELING BY CAR, AND THE CONCERN OF THE LEADERS WITH THEIR SECURITY WAS SUCH THAT KAYSON, NOUHAK AND OTHER LEADERS RARELY LEFT THE CONFINES OF THE KILOMETER 6 COMPOUND. (SOMPHOU DESCRIBED THE FORMER U.S. ESTABLISHMENT AT KILOMETER 6 AS BEING VERY BADLY MAINTAINED WITH TALL GRASS GROWING IN THE LAWNS AND THE HOUSES SMUDGED WITH THE SMOKE OF OUTDOOR COOKING FIRES.)

5. CALIBRE OF THE CADRE. DR. SOMPHOU SAID HE WAS ASTONISHED BY THE IGNORANCE AND LACK OF EDUCATION OF THE PATHET LAO CADRE. THE PATHET LAO WITH WHOM HE HAD WORKED WERE BARELY LITERATE AND, OF COURSE, THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD WAS ZERO. IT HAD ALSO BEEN A SURPRISE TO HIM TO SEE HOW QUICKLY THEY ADOPTED CORRUPT PRACTICES, CITING, FOR EXAMPLE, THE APPOINTMENT TO HIGH POSITIONS IN THE NATIONAL BANK (IN WHICH MRS. SOMPHOU WORKED) OF DEPENDENTS OF

SENIOR PATHET LAO CADRE WHO COULD NEITHER READ NOR WRITE AND SPENT A FEW HOURS A DAY LEARNING HOW.

6. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE UNITED STATES. ACCORDING TO DR. SOMPHOU, THE ATTITUDE OF THE PATHET LAO CADRE AT ALL LEVELS IS ONE OF IMPLACABLE HOSTILITY TOWARD THE UNITED STATES AND TOWARD THAILAND. THEY ARE DEEPLY IMBUED WITH THE PROPAGANDA IN WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN SOAKED FOR SO LONG. THEY AND THE VIETNAMESE WITH WHOM HE HAD CONTACT WERE UNANIMOUS IN PREACHING A DOCTRINE THAT NO COMPROMISE WAS POSSIBLE WITH THE "IMPERIALISTS," THAT ANY STEPS TOWARD RECONCILIATION WERE ONLY FOR IMMEDIATE TACTICAL ADVANTAGE, THAT THE "IMPERIALISTS" WERE CONTINUING THEIR TRADITIONAL MACHINATIONS AGAINST THE LIBERATED PEOPLES OF LAOS AND VIETNAM AND THAT IT WAS THE DUTY OF ALL LAO AND VIETNAMESE TO HELP FURTHER THE CAUSE OF REVOLUTION
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AND LIBERATION IN OTHER COUNTRIES.

7. COMMENT. DR. SOMPHOU AND HIS FAMILY ARE GOING TO AUSTRALIA AND OTHER MORE COMPREHENSIVE TALKS WILL BE HELD WITH HIM PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE. GIVEN HIS LONG TENURE IN POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY IN LAOS AND HIS LEFT-WING CREDENTIALS, HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN LAOS WAS PARTICULARLY STRIKING TO ME.
WHITEHOUSE

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